



CONNECTICUT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 18, 2021

In support of: SB 1007, AN ACT REQUIRING HEALTH INSURANCE AND MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR THE TREATMENT OF SEVERE OBESITY.

In support of: HB 6622, AN ACT CONCERNING PRESCRIPTION DRUG FORMULARIES AND LISTS OF COVERED DRUGS.

In support of: SB 1045, AN ACT CONCERNING STEP THERAPY, ADVERSE DETERMINATION AND UTILIZATION REVIEWS, AND HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR CHILDREN, STEPCHILDREN AND OTHER DEPENDENT CHILDREN.

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Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Senator Hwang, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I'm the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order which mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community. I wish I was able to testify in person today in support of these three bills, but I inadvertently missed the deadline for signing up. Please accept this written statement, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Weight gain is a very common side effect of psychiatric drugs. I know this from personal experience during my twenty-plus years of being on various medications. They permanently disrupt metabolism even after they are discontinued. **SB 1007** will provide an opportunity for people with mental health conditions who have gained significant amounts of weight as a result of taking medications to address their mental health conditions. Obesity is not simply a matter of willpower. Given the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people who are Black, brown, Indigenous and Asian, and the increased severity of COVID-19 when contracted by someone who is obese, this bill will also help address existing health disparities. I urge this committee to support the bill.

Thank you for **HB 6622**. People who are on medications to manage their health conditions (both physical and mental) choose their health plans based on coverage of prescription drugs. It is profoundly unfair for a health insurance company to change the tiers of drug coverage in the middle of a plan year. Please support this bill.

SB 1045 is an important bill that will increase access to health care. Step therapy and prior authorizations make it difficult for people who are trying to manage chronic illnesses and behavioral health conditions effectively to do so quickly – because when insurance companies are able to demand that you fail first on a cheaper drug before they will cover the more expensive medication recommended by your doctor, what happens during that time is that you suffer. Generics do not always produce the same effects as the brand name drug – and generics from different companies often perform differently. Again, this is something I know from personal experience and am happy to share more details with anyone should you wish to enquire more. It should not require signing an appeal letter with “Esq.” after one’s name in order to be able to pick up a prescription from a pharmacy. Prior authorizations and step therapy may save money, but these policies hurt people. Thank you for this bill, and I encourage the committee to support it.

Thank you for these actions on behalf of Connecticut’s residents. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Again, my apologies for not being with you today.

